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Educating for Peace through War: Reflections on Ten Days in a War Zone, Lebanon 2006

Brownyn Wood
Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

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BRONWYN WOOD

EDUCATING FOR PEACE THROUGH WAR:
Reflections on Ten Days in a War Zone, Lebanon 2006[1]

This paper presents an autobiographical perspective of war, drawing from the author's experience of ten days in southern Lebanon during the Israel-Lebanon conflict of 2006. Diary entries, art, photos and stories are introduced to provide a visual and textual snapshot. Drawing on these experiences, the author reflects on how the teaching of a sanitised version of war in social science classrooms often fails to explore the complexities and contradictions of war. She uses Freire's notion of praxis – the weaving together of critical consciousness and critical intervention – as a possibility for social scientists and educators in the global effort to reduce conflict and promote peace.

INTRODUCTION

> "If children are loved and valued, why are they still being used as cannon-fodder? We believe that love and respect for children are key to humanitarian and political progress....Avoiding future conflicts will require not just caring for the youngest victims of war, but also educating them for peace" (UNICEF 1996, 1).

The purpose of this paper is to provide some reflections upon war, drawing from my short-lived 'insider perspective' in Southern Lebanon in July, 2006. My reflections draw from my background as a social sciences high school teacher in New Zealand, a mother to my two small boys, and wife to my United Nations Military Observer (UNMO) husband. Through the introductions of three vignettes providing visual and textual insight into the experience, I intend to draw some reflections for educators and social scientists, in particular, on how the teaching of a sanitised version of war in social science classrooms often fails to explore the complexity and contradictions of war. In this paper, I pay heed to Denzin and Giardina's (2007) call to start with the personal and the biographical and our own location in the world around us as our point of reference when addressing the need for social change. I endeavour to

[1] Dedicated to the memory of Major Hans-Peter Lang, Austria – friend and neighbour in Tyre, Lebanon (1962-2006).

connect the personal, the political, and the cultural as a framework for critique and future possibilities (Denzin and Giardina 2007). While this is not intended to be an autoethnography proper, the use of autobiographical text in this paper endeavours similarly to use the 'power of narrative to reveal and revise that world, even when we struggle for words, when we fail to find them, or when the unspeakable is invoked but not silent' (Holman Jones 2008:211).

SETTING THE SCENE - THE 2006 LEBANON WAR

The 2006 Lebanon War, known in Lebanon as the *July War* (AFP 2008), and in Israel as the *Second Lebanon War* (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2006) lasted for 33 days before the UN Security Council called for a Ceasefire to end the hostilities on 14 August, 2006. The final 'war tallies' were markedly uneven. According to Lebanese authorities, the conflict resulted in 1,191 deaths, 4,409 injured, and more than 900,000 people fleeing their houses (UN Human Rights Council 2006). On the other side of the 'technical fence'[2], 43 Israeli civilians were killed, 1489 wounded and a further 116 Israeli soldiers were killed (BBC 2007).

My narrative begins in an improvised 'bomb shelter' - the car park under our seven-storey apartment in Tyre, Southern Lebanon. We had only lived there for three weeks, having crossed over the border from Israel where my husband had a previous six-month posting on the Golan Heights. He was working for a year as an UNMO as part of the New Zealand Defence Force's on-going commitment to the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO)[3]. As an accompanied posting, my two young sons (aged four and six) and I resided close to my husband's workplace. In Israel we had made local friends, learned some Hebrew, and we travelled round the region extensively. We were beginning the same pattern of life in Lebanon. Four days before the following diary entry the Hezbollah had staged a raid on the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) on the northern border of Israel, killing eight soldiers and kidnapping a further two

[2] The technical fence marks the Israeli-defined version of the border between Israel and Lebanon and Syria – a contested definition.
[3] UNTSO is the world's first and longest running peacekeeping mission. It has been operating in the Middle East since 29 May, 1948. The New Zealand Defence Force provides about twelve officers each year as part of its ongoing peacekeeping commitment with the UN.

(Katz, Keinon, and staff 2006). The IDF responded to this "act of war" (PM Olmert's words, in Katz, Keinon, and staff 2006) by launching an air assault in Lebanon, destroying roads, buildings, petrol stations, bridges and the Beirut airport runway. By June 16, we were 'stuck' in Tyre with no road or air options for evacuation remaining.

DIARY IN THE BOMB SHELTER
JUNE 16, 2006

The situation gets more desperate and unbelievable by the day.
All around me are tired women, cranky kids, restless men, a dog
And at all times
The IDF spy Drone above and
The bombs echoing in the distance and closer.

The listlessness of just sitting
Waiting
Hoping
Longing for a ceasefire
A chance to leave.

How can they do this to the people of Lebanon?
They break every rule in the book; the logic is gone, it is pure barbarism.

We have been here for six hours already.
Moving from moments of hilarity and laughter,
To moments of despair and stomach-gnawing anxiety.

The children happily watch a DVD on the laptop...
Banned from bouncing their ball;
The noise is too close to the sound of bombs hitting the ground for the old people.

For the first time I think about death. Maybe I never will see New Zealand again.
Or walk down to collect the mail from my letter box?
Mostly I just think about escape.

Surely the world must come to our aid. The UN? Where are they?
Impotent in the face of these lawless bastards with their so-brave jets and bombs.

Can't they see how desperate it is?
How many people are dying?
How close the bombs are falling?

How much longer?

I really believed we could get out
Under some immunity clause in the Book of Human Rights.
But now I'm not so sure.
All the rules are gone,
As happens in war,
And it is the civilians who are damaged.

-/-/-

The irony of the final statement was realised only four hours later. We returned to our apartment, tiring of the nine hours in the bomb shelter to prepare dinner. At 5:30pm the IDF dropped a 1000 pound aerial bomb that destroyed the neighbouring building 150 metres away (see Figure 1). The blast blew out the windows of our apartment, showering our rooms with boulders and glass. Luckily, we all managed to avoid the shrapnel by sheltering behind a wall with no windows. Within ten minutes, UN colleagues burst through the doors to see if we were alive. We fled to a local hotel where the UN had an office (the Resthouse), passing through gunpowder-smelling, dust-filled streets edged with bombed out cars – constantly in fear of a second incoming bomb. We remained there for five days, sleeping on the floor in a large room with growing numbers of 'refugees' and declining levels of water and food. After ten days in this war zone, a UN chartered ship managed to gain clearance to take all UN dependents and many Lebanese to Cyprus. The boys and I said good-bye to my husband on the docks, leaving him to continue peacekeeping to fulfill his allocated year. We didn't realise then that it would be five months before we were reunited.

Figure 1:
The neighbouring building that was hit by an IDF 1000 pound bomb. Twelve civilians died and fifty were wounded (UN Human Rights Council 2006). Our apartment was about 150 metres away to the right.

Figure 2:
This was the explosion we were in the middle of. Our friend Eva took this photo from the other end of Tyre.

SAFE IN CYPRUS

After about twenty-two hours on board the *HMS Serenade*, we docked at Larnaca, Cyprus. Along with thousands of other evacuees, we formed queues to be processed into expensive hotels – already over-crowded by the mid-summer influx of European tourists.

My eldest son kept on asking "Are we safe now, Mum? Will the jets reach us here? Where is the bomb shelter in the hotel?" A week later, in London, he heard the rumble of thunder and ran out of the house to check if the jets had returned. "Don't worry, Mum", he told me. "If they bomb us again, we'll just get our bags and go to another country". The sentiments of an experienced global refugee.

We returned to school in New Zealand and my son enjoyed the familiarity and comfort of warmly welcoming friends and teachers. We talked to his father (back in Lebanon) frequently by phone and had constant emails. What I failed to realise was that my son's anxiety for his father was affecting all of his schooling. It came out in small ways. Some days he couldn't read at the expected levels. Other days he could read beyond what was expected. The teachers placed him into 'remedial reading' in their confusion. When all the children were asked to draw a place of safety, my son drew the warships surrounding the island of Cyprus (Figure 3). Other children sketched their bedroom or their backyard. My son found security in huge warships.

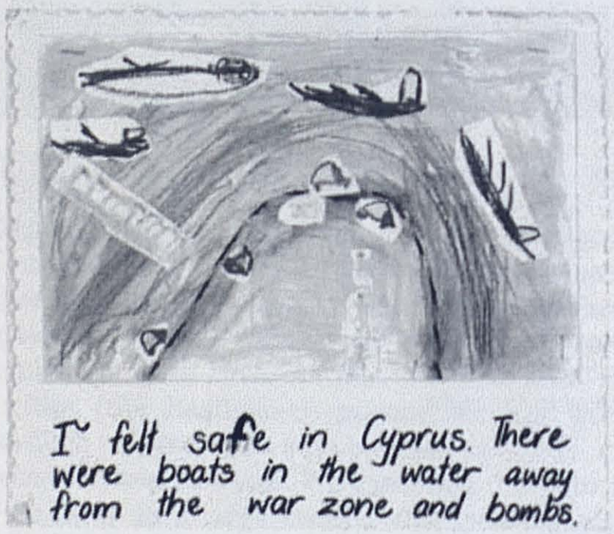

Figure 3: I felt safe...

Once his father came home, my son gradually moved up from the remedial group. A year later, he was placed in the top reading group in the class. Although he appeared fine, something just wasn't quite right emotionally until he knew his dad was safe. His experience of war and separation from a parent was short-lived. The children of Gaza, Darfur and Basra don't have the luxury of leaving the conflict zone and recovering the complete safety of a peaceful nation like New Zealand. If my son was so negatively influenced after ten days in a conflict zone, what would their lives and learning be like?

THE UGLY STUFF OF WAR
JULY 26, 2006, CYPRUS

"Bron! Phone call", Kath called urgently.
I stood up quickly and raced to the phone. At seven in the morning, I hadn't been expecting any phone calls to my Cyprus Hotel.
"Bron, it's me". My husband voice disappeared down the crackly line.
"They're all dead", he continued.
"Who? Who's dead?" I gasped as my mind was racing. *He* can't be dead. He's still talking...
"All my UN Team at Patrol Base Khiam. Hans-Peter, Wolf, Jarno and Du."[4] More gulps. Silence.
"Are you hurt? Where are you? What happened"?
"They've been bombed at Patrol Base Khiam by the Israelis. I'm nearby. I was meant to be there to relieve them but our convoy was delayed by heavy shelling. I never made it".

This conversation marked the beginning of what only could be described as forty-eight hours of hell on earth for my husband. As one of the first on the scene at Patrol Base Khiam the day after the bombing, he had the grizzly task of identifying the remains of his UN colleagues, amidst the twisted and tortured remains of the Base (Figures 4 and 5). He then travelled with other UN Military Observers to take the body bags across southern Lebanon under heavy shelling, to reach the technical fence. They carried the body bags over a live mine field to the 'other side'. The IDF picked him up in a helicopter and flew him and the body bags to the UN Headquarters in Jerusalem. The irony of being 'rescued' by those responsible for the event did not go unnoticed.

No adequate explanation has ever been provided for the bunker bomb that killed all four of the unarmed peacekeepers in Patrol Base Khiam. On that day, in the words of one UNIFIL[5] soldier, "[e]ven the sky was numb..." (Major Pandey 2006). [6]

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[4] The UNMO's killed at Patrol Base Khiam included Major Hans Peter Lang (Austria), Major Paeta, Hess-Von Kruedener (also known as Wolf – Canada), Lieutenant Jarno Makinen (Finland) and Major Du Zhaoyu (China).
[5] UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) operating alongside UNTSO in southern Lebanon since 1978.
[6] (See Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007 FAQ Why did the IDF bomb a UN post, resulting in the death of four UN soldiers? for an Israeli response.) (See UN Human Rights Council 2006, 4 Point 19 for a UN Human Rights Council response.)

Figures 4 and 5: Patrol Base Khiam after bombing by the IDF.

-/-/-

I struggled to deal with some of my emotions following this incident: the confusion, the anger, the desire to stereotype the actions of a small group of people as representative of a whole. 'Good' social scientists surely don't feel such emotions. But to ignore that temporary response is to deny the 'rage' that remains in the hearts and minds of people in any zone of conflict in the world. It may be why, in part, the so-called 'solutions' to war make so little ground. I can now say time has tempered those initial heated emotions. In fact, the best form of healing was talking to friends who had remained in Israel. Their loathing of the Hezbollah's random rockets was felt with equal intensity to mine toward Israeli bombs. We realised that there is always another side to the story in war...

We cannot underestimate the impact of war. The devastation upon countries – socially, economically, environmentally and politically – is beyond a figure we can name in terms of money. The devastation is wrought upon individuals in ways we cannot see. The impact on my son and his temporary unsettled learning difficulties is a case and point – and that was only after ten days in a war zone. Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2006) report that 2,773 people in Israel were treated for shock and anxiety during and following the war, and approximately USD 1.4 billion of revenue was lost as a result of the war. Similarly, the UN Human Rights Council (2006) considers that it will take years for Lebanon, with the help of the international community, to rebuild the damaged buildings and infrastructure and

to deal with the oil spill that devastated two-thirds of Lebanon's coastline following the bombing of the Jiyyeh power plant.

No experience could have prepared me for the horror and ferocity of war. And yet, my whole experience was framed by membership in "privileged" groups. We were associated with the UN, which provided some comfort during the experience and gave me my "ticket to ride" on the *MV Serenade* which evacuated us to Cyprus. I belonged to a western nation which was speaking out internationally on our behalf (see Palmer, Watkins, and agencies 2007; Houlahan 2007). I had access to psychologists after the war and had insurance to cover some of the unforseen expenses incurred. Imagine a war experience in the absence of these privileges - which is how MOST of the world experience war. Drawing together the threads raised within the three vignettes, I wish to reflect on some of the "lessons learned" from my exposure to war, especially in reference to educating against war, for peace.

EDUCATING FOR PEACE THROUGH WAR

> "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." - UNESCO
>
> "We must become the change we want to see." - Gandhi

Following my exposure to war in Lebanon, I was painfully aware of how inadequately we address the issue of war in our classrooms. Most social studies[7] units examining war and human rights involve a tokenistic examination of the Geneva Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This would be followed by a case study of people in a war zone in a distant country, an examination of refugee flows and the role of peacekeepers in promoting global peace. While this may have provided some insight for my students, I can now see that it failed to adequately deal with the complexity and contradictions of war, and it also failed to highlight the personal and social significance of conflict in our world.

[7] Social studies in New Zealand is an essential learning area of the curriculum and provides an integrated approach to learning within the social sciences for students in Years 1-10.

The rules just didn't work in a war zone like they did in my classroom. I could look out my window in Tyre and see Israeli bombs falling around civilian apartments. I could watch the news that night and hear Israeli officials assure the world that their targets were not civilians but the Hezbollah. I heard stories of the Hezbollah, sheltering as close as they could to UN positions to gain some sort of immunity (Point 26 UN Human Rights Council 2006, 6). The ideals and hopes I had in my classroom for educating responsible global citizens to build a better world together were shattered in the face of such savagery. The sanitised version of war I taught from distant New Zealand and the clichéd "solutions" for peace failed to even come close to touching the hot issues of hatred, revenge and the international politics of power in war. My teaching also failed to account for aspects of courage, bravery and sacrifice exhibited in war. This was witnessed no more so than by the actions of my husband's Austrian team leader, Hans-Peter Lang. He insisted on taking the first relief position to Patrol Base Khiam in place of my husband's rostered role so that my husband could remain with us during our final days of waiting for our evacuation ship. We never had a chance to thank Hans-Peter. He was killed in the bunker of Patrol Base Khiam on July 25, 2006.

In reference to teaching peace through war, I have found two simple, yet powerful ideas in the writings of the Brazilian educational philosopher, Paulo Freire: critical consciousness and critical intervention. The traditional model of teaching about war focuses on teaching the facts about war. Freire (1973) refers to this model of teaching as "banking education", in which the teacher imparts knowledge to students who, as depositories, patiently receive, memorise and repeat these deposits. He calls for a rejection of this model of education and a replacement with "problem-posing" education and the emergence of *critical consciousness* and *critical intervention* in reality. Critical consciousness requires a recognition that the problems and challenges of other human beings are also our problems. It necessitates an awareness of the unspoken human emotions of fear, hatred and revenge that continue to fuel conflict generation after generation. This awareness, then, leads to the 'emergence of consciousness' (Freire 1973, 68) of issues and challenges facing us in our world. This forms the starting point for education in which students use problem-posing to critique and evaluate the world. Through this process, Freire argues that they

will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond through critical intervention in reality (Freire 1973, 68-69).

Developing critical consciousness involves listening to the stories of those in conflict areas. It requires treading into the landmine-ridden area of conflicting human values and beliefs. The current neoliberal outcomes-based model of education to which most western nations now ascribe provides little opportunity for examining the messy issues of controversy and conflict (Wood 2007). Yet, if we acknowledge that 'our students will inherit a world of baffling complexity' (National Council for the Social Studies 1992), then we need to provide them with a deeper understandings of the beliefs and values that inform the actions of warring parties. We need to model that asking questions is at least as important as finding answers and to support student 'forays into confusion and contradiction' (Hirsh 2004, 423). Zygmunt Bauman goes further, arguing that any notion of social or political agency is dependent on a culture of questioning, whose purpose is to 'keep the forever unexhausted'...by 'prodding human society to go on questioning itself and preventing that questioning from ever stalling or being declared finished' (Bauman and Tester 2001, 4).

If we are serious about preparing a generation of young people who will say "no" to war, we need to give them the ability to critique the media and to look for "the other side" to a story and to examine multiple perspectives – not just one. As (Hirsh 2004, 421) suggests: The future of our civilisation as we know it may depend on our ability to sort through increasingly complex and often one-sided bulletins without being swayed by patriotism, greed or emotion.

The media tempt us into simplistically thinking there are 'goodies' and 'baddies' in war, and 'tries to force us to support one' (Hirsh 2004, 424). My experience showed me that war is far more complex than that. What we saw on the ground rarely matched the story presented on the news that night. The growing presence of 'the citizen voice' on the Internet as a perspective beyond the media may help to examine issues from multiple viewpoints.

Back in safe New Zealand, the weight of responsibility on me seemed huge. At the heart of my identification as an educator is a feeling that education can and does make a difference. As Greene (1988, 3) says,

'...those of us committed to education are committed not only to effecting communities but preparing the ground for what is to come'. I had escaped. I had returned to a place where freedom, beauty, hope and even consumerism were luxuries taken for granted. Yet, how could I work toward global change so my children, and those of Lebanon and Israel, need never have to experience war again?

The luxury of peace leads to responsibility. It seems to me that debate about war, conflict and peaceful solutions, lies in the hands of those nations who have the luxury of stability and peace. War reduces the ability to reflect, critique and to plan for a life beyond conflict. Living 'on the edge' during and following war often means acting on instinct and living for the moment with little ability to consider long-term implications. Life becomes all about survival. Your next meal. Your next move. We were jittery for weeks and even months after. A jet overhead could set the knot back in my stomach in seconds. Only in the safety and distance of a land with no bombs could I begin to consider how we could work toward a more peaceful planet. The irony of this is that nations which are far away from war rarely see conflict as a pressing challenge. Rising oil prices and acts of terrorism are potentially reducing this divide and may quicken the desire for global debate and responsibility.

We need to move beyond teaching 'participation through passivity' (White 2005) to show that there are also times for responsible social action. Giroux (2003, 24) calls for a renewed agency of scholars and citizen activists who are 'willing to connect their own teaching and service with broader democratic concerns over equality, justice and an alternative vision of what the school might be and what society might become'. Freire (1973) describes the need not for activism (action for action's sake), or verbalism (idle chatter) but instead *praxis*: the action and reflection of men [sic] upon their world in order to transform it (Freire 1973, 75-76). Praxis is the weaving together of critical consciousness and critical intervention – a process of action-reflection to transform injustice in society. In reference to war, students require the ability to critique the origins, experiences and representations of war, but also the courage to take a stance against violence and conflict in their local places as well as the global village.

FINAL WORDS

Some of the above story is still unresolved. Some of it requires further personal 'social action' of sorts. It still fuels a constant interest in the Middle East and re-connections with people with whom I spent those ten days in a war zone. Since returning to New Zealand, I have begun a PhD examining youth participation in social action within social studies. Above all, a close up experience of war has made me even more determined to dream toward creating a more peaceful and just future.

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BRONWYN WOOD is a doctoral student in education at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. Bronwyn has travelled and lived in many parts of Asia and the Middle East, but nothing could have quite prepared her for managing to get caught up in the Israel-Lebanon War of 2006. With experience in social sciences education and curriculum development, she is currently researching youth motivation and participation in social action in relation to the social studies curriculum.

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